Film to Detail 'Plot' to Kill Kennedy

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LOS ANGELES, June 11—Filming is under way here on a movie called "Executive Action," which deals with a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy.

Starring Burt Lancaster, Robert Ryan and Will Geer, the movie will be released by National General Pictures before the end of the year, to coincide with the 10th anniversary of Mr. Kennedy's death on Nov. 22. Edward Lewis ("Seven Days in May," "The Fixer") is the producer, and David Miller ("Lonely Are the Brave") is directing from a screenplay by Dalton Trumbo, Donald Freed and Mark Lane.

Herbert Magidson, a Los Angeles businessman active in the antiwar movement, put up most of the money for the film, described as a "big budget" production.

The producer is trying to withhold more detailed information about the production until shooting is completed in two or three weeks. According to his press representative, Steve Jaffe, there have been rumors of Central Intelligence Agency interest in the project, and one crew member reported a C.I.A. threat to sabotage the production.

Although no one has attempted to halt the production, the locations are being kept secret, and Mr. Freed reports unusual security guards on the set. One source reports that the company has already done some filming in Texas and Tulsa, Okla., which is doubling for Dallas in a number of scenes.

Complex Plot Seen

Mr. Jaffe refuses to disclose the contents of the film, but a novelization of the screenplay, by Mr. Freed and Mr. Lane, will soon be published. All parties agree it is "very close"—though not identical—to the final shooting script. The novel describes a complex assassination plot designed and executed by Texas oilmen, retired right-wing military personnel, C.I.A. agents, anti-Castro Cubans and the Mafia.

In the Freed-Lane scenario, Lee Harvey Oswald is only a decoy planted to divert investigators from the four real assassins; the murder of Oswald is planned in advance, and Jack Ruby is a member of the labyrinthine conspiracy network. The precise details of the film's plot cannot be verified, but Oswald is definitely a character.

Mr. Lancaster, Mr. Ryan and Mr. Geer play three of the high-level conspirators. Many of the characters in the movie will be identified by their real names, while others are composites of real people, identified by fictitious names. Newsreel footage from 1963 will be used in the movie.

All the participants assert that "Executive Action" is an interpretation of available evidence on the assassination that the film makers believe to be "more logical" than the Warren Commission's theory of one lone assassin. While conceding that part of the film is purely speculative, Mr. Jaffe, Mr. Freed and Mr. Lane insist that a great deal of it can be documented, and they plan to distribute corroborative research material at the time of the film's release. According to Mr. Jaffe, some of the factual material has never been published before.

Mr. Freed and Mr. Lane wrote the first screenplay of "Executive Action" approximately two years ago. Mr. Freed is also the author of "Inquest," a play about the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and "Agony in New Haven," a book about the Black Panther conspiracy trial.

Mr. Lane, author of "Rush to Judgment"—one of the earliest and most controversial critiques of the Warren Commission report—supplied much research material for "Executive Action." Both authors traveled extensively, and talked to C.I.A. informants and other witnesses while working on their script.

At that time Donald Sutherland, the actor, owned the screenplay, but he sold it to Mr. Magidson and Mr. Lewis, who brought in Mr. Trumbo to work with Mr. Freed and Lane on the final rewrite. Shooting began a little more than a month ago.

Mr. Jaffe, Mr. Freed and Mr. Lane all state that they expect audiences to be much more receptive to their conspiracy theory after the Watergate revelations. Mr. Freed is currently preparing a film about Watergate, titled "Operation Gemstone."